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ABSTRACT

With their traditional tribal and kinship ties, Native Americans had lived for centuries without the concept of an unwanted child. But besieged by reservation life and boarding school acculturation, many tribes, with the encouragement of whites, came to accept the need for orphanages. This book tells the story of Indian orphanages within the larger context of the orphan asylum in America. The history of these orphanages and the cultural factors that produced and sustained them is related, showing how orphans became a part of Native experience after Euro-American contact, and how Indian societies addressed the issue of child dependency. A number of orphanages from the 1850s to the 1940s are examined in depth, particularly among the Five Civilized Tribes in Oklahoma, the Seneca in New York, and the Ojibway and Sioux in South Dakota. Federal policies during the Civil War, disease, and economic depression contributed to their establishment and white social workers and educational reformers helped undermine Native culture by supporting such institutions. Orphanages differed from boarding schools by being either tribally supported or funded by religious groups; how they fit into social welfare programs established by federal and state policies is explained. The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 overturned years of acculturation policy by allowing Native Americans to finally reclaim their children, and the importance of that legislation is explored. (Contains 429 references, chapter notes, and an index.) (TD)

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